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ABSTRACT

Higher education planning in Mexico is discussed, with attention to: conceptual characteristics of Mexico's higher education planning system; relationships among the national, regional, state, and institutional planning levels; and design and operation of the Comprehensive Program for the Development of Higher Education. Responsibilities of national coordinating bodies, regional council, state commissions, and institutional planning units are identified. Since the establishment of a national planning system in 1978, different sectors and governmental bodies have cooperated in the design of educational policy. General planning guidelines were developed, and national and state goals were articulated. Planning efforts concentrated on functions of teaching, research extension, and administrative support. The Comprehensive Program for the Development of Higher Education was the result of 1 year of meetings and assessments among the different planning levels. A technical advisory board, as well as four specialized technical groups, were created. Problems in higher education were identified, and remedial strategies were proposed. (SW)

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PARTICIPATIVE EVALUATION FOR FORMING HIGHER EDUCATION
POLICY: THE NATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION PLANNING SYSTEM*

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THE NATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION PLANNING SYSTEM

EDUCATIONAL PLANNING FOR HIGHER EDUCATION IN MEXICO HAS RECEIVED SPECIAL ATTENTION IN RECENT YEARS. THE SIGNIFICANT GROWTH EXPERIENCED BY HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE SEVENTIES AND EARLY EIGHTIES, AS WELL AS THE IMPERIOUS NEED TO RELATE ITS FUNCTIONS TO THE COUNTRY'S PRESSING DEVELOPMENTAL REQUIREMENTS, CONTRIBUTED TO THE ESTABLISHMENT IN 1978 OF A NATIONAL PLANNING SYSTEM. SINCE THEN, AND FOR THE FIRST TIME IN EDUCATIONAL PLANNING HISTORY, AUTONOMOUS PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS, PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES, AND FEDERAL AND STATE GOVERNMENTS HAVE BEGUN TO WORK TOGETHER IN THE DESIGN OF EDUCATION POLICY.

FOLLOWING IS A DESCRIPTION OF THIS PLANNING SYSTEM FOCUSING PRIMARILY IN THREE ASPECTS: A) ITS CONCEPTUAL CHARACTERISTICS, B) THE DYNAMIC RELATIONSHIP TAKING PLACE AMONG THE DIFFERENT DECISION MAKING BODIES, AND FINALLY, C) THE PROCESS BY WHICH THE COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAM FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION WAS DESIGNED AND PUT IN OPERATION.

A) CONCEPTUAL CHARACTERISTICS OF MEXICO'S HIGHER EDUCATION PLANNING SYSTEM.

IN ORDER FOR THE SYSTEM TO BE EFFECTIVE IT WAS CONSIDERED NECESSARY THE FOLLOWING:

- AN ACTIVE PARTICIPATION OF ALL HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS AS WELL AS PUBLIC AND PRIVATE ENTITIES RELATED TO THIS EDUCATIONAL LEVEL IN THE DESIGN AND OPERATION OF PLANS AND PROGRAMS.
- THE ESTABLISHMENT OF GENERAL PLANNING GUIDELINES SO THAT EACH INSTITUTION ADOPTS THEM IN SO FAR AS THEY ARE CONSISTENT WITH THEIR OWN PHILOSOPHY AND SPECIFIC DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS, ITS'S BY THIS PROCESS THAT INSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENTS ARE GENERATED, AIMED TOWARDS THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF NATIONAL AND STATE GOALS.
- THAT INSTITUTIONAL ENDEAVORS BE PERMANENTLY BASED UPON AN EVALUATION OF ITS RESULTS AS WELL AS ON THE ASSESSMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES THAT OCCUR.
- A PROSPECTIVE APPROACH BE INTEGRATED IN THE PLANNING PROCESS, KEEPING IN MIND AN IDEAL FUTURE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION AND MEXICAN SOCIETY AS A WHOLE.
- THAT TEACHING, RESEARCH EXTENSION AND ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT FUNCTIONS BE INCLUDED IN THE PLANNING EFFORTS.
- THAT ALTERNATIVE ACTIONS BE CONSIDERED TO SOLVE CHANGING CIRCUMSTANCES THAT MIGHT AFFECT THE PLAN'S DEVELOPMENT, AND
- THAT THE PLANNING PROCESS BE PREDOMINANTLY ACTION ORIENTED, INFLUENCING DECISION MAKING AND INSTITUTIONAL OPERATION WITHIN A BALANCED AND COORDINATED DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK OF THE HIGHER EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM.

B) RELATIONSHIPS AMONG THE NATIONAL, REGIONAL, STATE AND INSTITUTIONAL PLANNING LEVELS.

THE NATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION PLANNING SYSTEM CONSISTS OF PLANNING BODIES AT THE NATIONAL, REGIONAL, STATE AND INSTITUTIONAL LEVELS. THE NATIONAL COORDINATION FOR THE PLANNING OF HIGHER EDUCATION IS RESPONSIBLE FOR ANALYSING GLOBAL PROBLEMS AFFECTING MEXICAN HIGHER EDUCATION; DESIGNING STRATEGIC GUIDELINES DIRECTED TOWARDS THEIR SOLUTION; SUPPORTING AND PROMOTING COMMUNICATION LINKS BETWEEN INSTITUTIONS AND THE DIFFERENT SECTORS, SO THAT THEY ACT IN AN INTEGRATED MANNER CONSISTENT WITH THE PROPOSED GUIDELINES.

THE REGIONAL COUNCILS ARE EXPECTED TO IDENTIFY COMMON PROBLEMS WITHIN THE STATES MEMBERS OF EACH REGION, GENERATE INTERINSTITUTIONAL ACTIONS AIMED AT THEIR SOLUTION, AND DESIGN RESOURCE AND EXPERIENCE SHARING STRATEGIES TO FURTHER THE DEVELOPMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION'S ROLE WITHIN EACH AREA.

THE STATE COMMISSIONS DEFINE SPECIFIC DEMOGRAPHIC, ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC PROBLEMS REGARDING EACH STATE, ESTABLISH STATE POLICY AND GUIDELINES TO HELP ORIENT THE SYSTEM'S DEVELOPMENT, AND DESIGN COOPERATIVE PROGRAMS BETWEEN INSTITUTIONS.

THE INSTITUTIONAL PLANNING UNITS IN ACCORDANCE TO EACH INSTITUTION'S ENVIRONMENT, LEGAL STATUS AND PHILOSOPHY, COORDINATE DEPARTMENT EFFORTS CONDUCIVE TO THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE EDUCATIONAL SERVICES PROVIDED; AS WELL AS ASSIST IN THE OPERATION

OF A FORMATIVE AND SUMMATIVE EVALUATION SYSTEM, WHICH PROVIDES STATE, REGIONAL AND NATIONAL PLANNING BODIES WITH RELEVANT INFORMATION CONCERNING THE SYSTEM'S DEVELOPMENT.

A BASIC CHARACTERISTIC OF THE PLANNING SYSTEM IS ITS ITERATIVE NNESS; NATIONAL GUIDELINES ARE PROPOSED CONSIDERING INSTITUTIONAL, STATE AND REGIONAL INPUT. AT THE SAME TIME, THESE GUIDELINES SERVE AS A GENERAL FRAMEWORK FROM WHERE PROGRAMS AT EACH LEVEL ARE DESIGNED.

THIS TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION MECHANISM ALLOWS A CONSTANT FLOW OF RELEVANT INFORMATION HELPING DECISION MAKING. PROGRAM GOALS AND OBJECTIVES ARE ADJUSTED PERIODICALLY CONSIDERING AVAILABLE INFORMATION IN REGARD TO ACCESS, FINANCE, RESEARCH AND OTHER RELEVANT ISSUES.

THE SYSTEM'S OPERATION REQUIRES SUFFICIENT CONCEPTUAL, FINANCIAL AND TECHNICAL SUPPORT. WITHIN THE NATIONAL ORGANISM EFFORTS HAVE BEEN MADE TO PROVIDE STATE AND INSTITUTIONAL PLANNING UNITS WITH ADDITIONAL FINANCIAL RESOURCES. AT THE SAME TIME PLANNING HANDBOOKS HAVE BEEN PRODUCED AND DISTRIBUTED AMONG THE PLANNING UNITS. THESE HANDBOOKS HAVE ALSO SERVED AS BASIS FOR WORKSHOPS AND SPECIFIC INSTITUTIONAL ASSISTANCE GIVEN BY A PROFESSIONAL ADVISORY TEAM. ONE OF THE MAIN BENEFITS OF THIS ACADEMIC ENDEAVOR HAS BEEN THE DEFINITIONS OF PLANNING CONCEPTS, METHODOLOGIES, MEASUREMENT PROCEDURES

AND INSTRUMENTS, AS WELL AS ANALYTICAL TECHNIQUES. CONSIDERING THE VAST NUMBER AND DIFFERENT CHARACTERISTICS OF MEXICAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IT IS PARAMOUNT TO THE SYSTEM THAT IT OPERATES WITH HOMOGENEOUS DATA. TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE HAS ALSO BEEN PROVIDED IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF A DATA BASE INFORMATION SYSTEM WHICH ENABLES EACH INSTITUTION TO GATHER AND SUMINISTER DATA TO THE STATE AND NATIONAL PLANNING UNITS.

c) DESIGN AND OPERATION OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAM FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION.

THE COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAM FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION IS THE RESULT OF A YEAR'S LONG PARTICIPATIVE PROCESS AMONG THE DIFFERENT PLANNING LEVELS. AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL, AFTER A MEETING WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF EACH STATE PLANNING COMISSION, A STRATEGY WAS DEVISED THAT ACTIVELY INVOLVED ALL THE PLANNING BODIES. THE TECHNICAL ADVISORY BOARD WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DEFINITION OF THE PROCESS BY WHICH THE PROGRAM WAS TO BE DESIGNED. ALSO, FOUR SPECIALIZED TECHNICAL GROUPS WERE DEVELOPED, WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF UNIVERSITIES, TECHNICAL INSTITUTIONS AND SCHOOLS OF EDUCATION OF DIFFERENT LEGAL STATUS AND IDEOLOGICAL ORIENTATION.

THESE GROUPS WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ASSESSMENT AND PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION'S FUNCTIONS, AS WELL AS FOR THE PROPOSAL OF REMEDIAL STRATEGIES.

TO ALLOW ACTIVE PARTICIPATION OF STATE AND INSTITUTIONAL PLANNING UNITS, REUNIONS WERE HELD AFTER EACH PLANNING STEP WAS COMPLETED.

IN THE BEGINNING, EACH STATE COMMISSION WAS ASKED TO DIAGNOSE THE BASIC PROBLEMS INFLUENCING THE DEVELOPMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THEIR RESPECTIVE STATES. BOTH THE EVALUATIONS MADE BY THE SPECIALIZED TECHNICAL GROUPS AND EACH STATE COMMISSION, SERVED AS IMPORTANT INPUT IN THE NATIONAL EVALUATION OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM. ONCE THIS WAS DONE, A SECOND SET OF MEETINGS TOOK PLACE; WHERE A DISCUSSION WAS HELD REGARDING THE PROBLEMS IDENTIFIED, AND THE DIFFERENT STRATEGIES THAT COULD BE ADOPTED. A PRELIMINARY VERSION OF THE NATIONAL STRATEGY OF THE PROGRAM WAS PRESENTED AT A THIRD ROUND OF MEETINGS. EACH STATE COMMISSION HAD THE OPPORTUNITY THEN TO PROVIDE FEEDBACK AND SUBMIT IDEAS FOR THEM TO BE INCLUDED IN THE FINAL VERSION. FINALLY, THE PROGRAM WAS APPROVED AT THE 22ND MEETING OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF UNIVERSITIES AND INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN OCTOBER OF LAST YEAR.

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